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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000088

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CARTER MEETING WITH GUINEAN PRESIDENCY
SECGEN SAM SOUMAH

REF: A. CONAKRY 1361

[1](#)B. CONAKRY 0085

Classified By: DCM KENT BROKENSHERE FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. In his initial meeting with Ambassador Carter, Sam Soumah, Secretary General of the Presidency, commented on Guinea's political situation, economy, legislative elections, and Hyperdynamics. Although Soumah emphasized Guinea's high esteem for the United States, he was guarded in his responses and spoke in vague terms. Often mentioned by contacts and the Guinean press as one of the key players within the presidency, Soumah came off as more of a loyal minion rather than a shrewd strategist. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) On January 30 Ambassador Carter met for an hour with Sam Mamady Soumah, Secretary General of the Presidency and a reputed force in the cadre of Old Guard that surrounds President Conte. Soumah and other members of the president's inner circle are reportedly responsible for much of the current tension between the President and Prime Minister. Dressed in a white traditional boubou and seemingly relaxed in his spacious but bare air conditioned office at the presidency, Soumah said the political situation in Guinea was largely driven by rumor. He said he had met with the country's political parties, and that he and the political parties "have a common vision" on the way forward.

[1](#)3. (C) Soumah did not elaborate on the "common vision" and seemed to deflect the Ambassador's questions concerning Guinea's subsidy dependent economy, saying only that the recent IMF agreement would provide Guinea with some breathing room. After the Ambassador explained that US policy in Guinea is based on a three-pronged approach of promoting economic reform, good governance, and elections, Soumah said he felt optimistic about elections since both the CENI and the Minister of Interior and Security had had experience in previous elections. (Note: All of Guinea's elections since independence have been considered flawed) Soumah said he understood the importance of free and fair elections in improving Guinea's image worldwide and in attracting foreign investors. He assured the Ambassador that any problems with the coming legislative elections will likely be due to incompetence and not malfeasance.

[1](#)4. (C) Throughout the meeting, Soumah made clear that Guinea holds the US in the highest esteem. He said that US assistance during Guinea's border troubles with Liberia in 2001 is something "no Guinean will ever forget," and emphasized that this is also the view of President Conte. Echoing a pro-American tone often heard in Guinea, Soumah added that Guineans "need the US vision and US support. We need your reassurance. This will give Guinea a chance to succeed."

15. (C) When the Ambassador turned the discussion to the issue of offshore oil exploration rights Hyperdynamics and solicited Soumah's view, the Secretary General said he traveled to Houston to see for himself if Hyperdynamics was a legitimate energy company or a shell operation. Satisfied that the company was legitimate, Soumah said he urged Hyperdynamics executives to visit Guinea, and even arranged a meeting between former AF Assistant Secretary Hank Cohen and President Conte. Soumah added that despite these efforts, differences remain. He noted that Hyperdynamics hoped to send a survey vessel into Guinean waters before discussions with the government, while the GoG insists that the vessel begin work only after talks have concluded. Soumah did not directly address what many see as a split in the government over Hyperdynamics, a split he reportedly widened by actively playing the role of agent for Hyperdynamics within the Presidency. In fact, Soumah told the Ambassador that Hyperdynamics needed to engage with the Ministry of Mines to resolve its contractual problems since that ministry is the only GoG authority responsible for hydrocarbon exploration in the country.

16. (C) Ambassador Carter then shifted to human rights issues, and asked if the Secretary General had any information on Lansana Komara, a member of the Rally for the People Guinean (RPG) opposition party who was reportedly arrested several weeks ago (reftels). The Ambassador said that since Komara's arrest, his family has had no news as to his whereabouts, and there is no indication that any charges have been placed against him. Soumah said he was not aware of the case, which has been featured in the Guinean press, but that he would make inquiries. The Ambassador said he would provide the Secretary General with a letter outlining further details of

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CONAKRY 00000088 002 OF 002

this case to facilitate his inquiries.

17. (C) Turning to military matters, Soumah said he had instructed Guinea's ambassador to Washington to discuss with the U.S. military ways in which both countries could cooperate to modernize Guinea's army and make it more professional. The Ambassador stated that the U.S. has military education programs that could assist Guinea play a greater role in ECOWAS.

COMMENT

18. (C) Throughout the meeting, Soumah appeared ill at ease and unsure of what to say at times. His contradictory statements that the CENI and Interior Ministry were experienced in hosting elections but that any possible problems would be due to incompetence were just one indication of Soumah's lack of intellectual depth. His comments regarding Hyperdynamics, particularly that the firm must engage the Ministry of Mines, were surprising given his efforts to ram this contract through the presidency despite GoG opposition to it. Though Soumah's name comes up frequently as one of the key political and economic manipulators within the presidency, he did not appear to be the keen strategist that other contacts make him out to be. Soumah is likely corrupt and party to much of the machinations of the presidency, but he came off in this initial meeting more as a venal follower rather than a conspiring leader. END COMMENT.
CARTER